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perhaps from the joint effects of the friction, and the salt mist, and had the same appearance as if scorched by the fire. Some of the earlier kinds, such as the willows, lilacs, &c. have since put out a new set of leaves. The violence of the wind may be appreciated from its having entirely dismantled vessels as they lay at anchor, with their sails furled, and from its havock among the trees. Upwards of twenty elms, in Boston alone, some of which were three feet in diameter at five feet from their roots, were torn entirely out of the ground. It is worthy of remark, that every one of these were of the European species. Not a single American elm was started, though many of their branches were twisted off. Out of a whole row on the western edge of the common, all the American, but only a single European elm, escaped. As our elm is in itself a much handsomer tree, and is so much stronger in its hold on the earth from the wide spread of its roots, it is perhaps expedient to give it the preference in all plantations. The American elm however is subject to having its foliage destroyed by worms, which do not attack the other species.

Though the gale was so severe and mischievous at Boston, it did little damage at Salem. The latter town had previously experienced a serious disasters in a hail storm, on the first of August, which in the course *ten minutes* broke 130,000 panes of glass. The season has in other respects been remarkable. The month of July was hotter and drier than it had been known to be for twenty-five years; and the months of August and September, an almost constant succession of cloudy and wet weather, accompanied with east and north-east winds; while at a short distance from the coast, and over the whole Atlantick, the winds have been almost without interruption westerly.

FOR THE NORTH-AMERICAN JOURNAL.

On the pleasure derived from witnessing scenes of distress.

We often derive pleasure from scenes of distress, both in real life and in the works of fiction. It is the object of the following remarks to state some of the evidence of the fact, and to explain the cause.

Children, when they are not wanting in the affections of humanity which cultivation and experience will unfold, sometimes inflict pain upon small animals for amusement. Crowds, in which may be found both sexes and all ages, assemble round a criminal at the whipping-post, at the gallows, and at other places of publick punishment. They run eagerly to the bloody contests of pugilists, to bull-baitings, and to the cock-pit. The Roman ladies habitually attended the combats of gladiators, and gave open applause when a successful effort was made by any of the combatants against another, although it might be at the expense of a limb or of life. A multitude is collected to behold a conflagration, an engagement between rival ships, a fleet in distress from a tempest, or armies falling in mutual destruction.

In the lighter operations of this law of our nature, we find that not only the rude and simple, but the humane and the intelligent, when called neither by business nor duty, visit jails, hospitals, mad-houses, and other institutions which exhibit pain and suffering. They who are most cultivated and benevolent, take delight in the emotions excited by the well wrought scenes of distress which are invented by the muse of Tragedy, or the genius of Romance. The power of real history is universal among readers of every description, to fasten their attention upon the sufferings it records, and to make them return with renewed interest to its sympathetick pages. We may extend our view even beyond the scenes of this life, and mark the effect produced upon the soul by the pictures of misery in another. We have seen by the experiment, how much pleasure coarse minds, which are not proper subjects for better modes of excitement, can receive from being roused by bold declamation upon the torments of eternity. They love the vehement eloquence which kindles only at the strong blaze of the infernal pit. They have not yet learned to enjoy the finer feelings which arise from enlightened understandings, elevated moral sentiments, and a cultivated taste. They drink not at the fountains of that high and holy pleasure which springs from the eloquence of divine philosophy, from affectionate, but rational religion. Still, this law of our nature in regard to the pleasure derived from scenes of distress is essentially the same in the rude and the refined. Cultivation does not annihilate old faculties and create new

ones, but unfolds, directs, and sanctifies such as we have already received in common from our Maker.

No one can be found, however perfectly endowed and educated, who does not take pleasure from the exercise of compassion, who is not willing to have his breast agitated by the sufferings of others. The Deity himself has affections. His mind is not mere intellect without feeling or sympathy. He is not satisfied with the possession of knowledge without love, with the exercise of power without a heart to be interested in the benevolent results of his providence. Every creature he has made shares in his affections, and the virtue and happiness of each contribute to the enjoyment of his own divine existence.

Having suggested some of the evidence of the fact that we often derive pleasure from scenes of distress, we will attempt an illustration of the cause. We do not suppose that the distress of others is, in itself, a source of pleasure to an uncorrupted mind, but that many scenes of distress call into operation such a variety of our faculties as to produce pleasure upon the whole, and sometimes to a very great degree. The pain of another, simply considered, is probably never pleasant even to a perverted mind. When we are excited by anger, by envy, by revenge, by wounded pride or disappointed ambition, we may be gratified with the pain which we are able to inflict; we may enjoy a malignant and transient happiness in contemplating the misery of those whom we hate. It is not in any of these respects that we design to pursue our inquiry. We mean to consider the mind, in the analysis we make of this subject, as in a natural and benevolent state, warmed with good affections, and influenced by worthy motives.

The first cause which we shall mention of the pleasure derived from scenes of distress is *sympathy*. By this is meant fellow feeling in general, the capacity to be affected by the affection of another without limiting the impression to those operations of the mind which are painful. We sympathize in the *pleasures* as well as in the *pains* of others. Sympathy, according to the meaning of the term, is social in its nature, and is one of the elements of benevolence. The exercise of it is often *ultimate*, an end in itself, a pleasure beyond which we make no inquiry for the reason of its existence. The emotions, which sympathy first

produces, are prior to any speculations of the understanding about them, and cannot of course be selfish or mercenary. To give action to such a power of the mind is a good, a felicity, without considering the relief of distress, or the co-operation in virtuous enterprises, to which it is often designed to lead us, and in which we discover a further end of its excitement. All scenes of distress, which interest our sympathy, do not afford us pleasure. Some of them are attended by such odious or barbarous circumstances as to make pain and disgust predominate. From these we fly. The degree of natural sensibility, cultivation, past associations and habits, are to be considered when we inquire into the effect which a given scene will produce upon a given mind. What may engage and please a child, may offend and shock him when he becomes a man. An execution, which might interest and entertain the rabble, would be a source of misery only to a refined and elevated mind. It is however a general law of our nature that whatever excites our sympathy shall give us pleasure in a greater or less degree. To be moved, to be roused, to be strongly affected, is itself delightful; and is, under suitable modifications, coveted by all. Apathy is one of the great enemies of human happiness, and whatever will relieve us from this we embrace or pursue with ardour. The exhilaration arising from fear, or a sense of danger, when the mind is not too powerfully affected, is pleasant and often sought, often renewed. It is one of the most lively enjoyments of the young and enterprising. This also constitutes the interest which many persons feel in the pictures of a local hell, burning with elemental fire. It relieves the apathy of unthinking minds, which have few resources, and gratifies the love of strong emotions.

Before we leave the subject of sympathy we ought to offer a remark upon those forms of it which are not thought to be benevolent. We may be made to sympathize with the spirit of anger and revenge, and to associate with others in the accomplishment of a vicious purpose. Here, however, the sympathy itself is laudable, although it may be perverted and abused. It is still social and benevolent as far as its own objects are concerned. It seeks what is esteemed to be a good for those to whom it is attached, and the gratification of it is a legitimate pleasure. The possessor

may deserve censure for his views and motives, while the sympathy itself is innocent and amiable.

The second cause to be mentioned in this inquiry is *curiosity*. This is one of the most active properties of our nature. When it is enlightened and well directed, it is also one of the most honourable, useful, and delightful. The abuses of it, which prevail in the conversation and pursuits of some of the members of society, are sufficiently contemptible, and produce considerable misery in the circles of weakness and folly. But in its genuine and elevated character it is a stimulus to knowledge and enterprise, a motive to activity and virtue, a source of permanent interest and happiness. It is connected with the most valuable operations of the mind, evidently with the cultivation of the understanding, and as really, though not as obviously, with sympathy. Curiosity makes us feel an interest in others, and thus tends to make others feel an interest in us. When a mind's curiosity is worn out, or permitted to sleep, its sympathy also has little or no activity. We then cease to please and to be pleased. Apathy oppresses us in solitude, and makes us a weight in society. On this account, those who have travelled and seen much, who have had great experience, whose knowledge is extensive and whose power to engage and delight others is unlimited, are sometimes found to be the most dull and depressing companions. They are not only without vivacity themselves, but they spread a deadening influence over the vivacity of others. Persons in every respect inferior to them, except in curiosity and sympathy, are far more instructive and useful as well as agreeable. Whenever we find a learned and intelligent old man, who has preserved his curiosity and sympathy in the midst of his attainments and experience, who maintains his interest in the persons and scenes around him, who cherishes the vivacity of youth in his heart, while snows cover his head, and whose affections have been warmed and elevated in proportion to the enlargement of his understanding and his views, we spontaneously love and admire him as the perfection of our nature, as one who has anticipated the spirit and the virtues of immortality.

In all new and interesting scenes, whether of enjoyment or suffering, curiosity goes with sympathy, and furnishes a

large part of the pleasure whose causes this essay is designed to explain. It is curiosity especially which leads us so eagerly to seek the place from whence a report of alarm or distress may have spread.

Nearly allied to curiosity is the *love of novelty*. These two properties of the mind appear to be quite distinct. Curiosity is higher and better than the love of novelty. The latter may exist in light and unfurnished minds which have nothing of that spirit of inquiry and analysis which characterizes the former. Such minds may desire *change* merely as a relief from *ennui*; and not at all as a source of new attainments in knowledge, sympathy, or virtue. Curiosity may be cherished in a high degree where there is little or no love of change, where the spirit of inquiry is vigorously pursued in a course of life which the lovers of novelty would call insufferably monotonous and dull. Curiosity and the love of novelty, however, are nearly allied in producing the pleasure which arises from scenes of distress.

Another source of this pleasure is thought by some to be a *secret comparison* which we make between our own security as spectators, and the distress of the sufferers. If this be true, it is selfish, and dishonourable. But it seems to us not to be among our early impressions. It has too much of deliberate calculation to mingle with the spontaneous and rapid emotions which occupy the mind, and give it the interest of the occasion. If this comparison be made at all, it must be very late in the operations of the mind, and must rather constitute a part of the pleasure in *reviewing* or describing the scene after it is past.

In witnessing some scenes of distress the emotions of *sublimity* and *piety* are highly excited in the beholder, and give a strong and sacred interest to the mind. We see courage, fortitude, magnanimity, all the generous and disinterested virtues. A good man preserving his integrity and equanimity, when surrounded by dangers and sufferings, is proverbially one of the noblest objects of contemplation, and fills the soul with the most exalted sentiments while it imparts the purest pleasure.

But what in technical language is called the *final cause*, or in common language the *end*, for which this pleasure from scenes of distress is made to arise, is an important

article in the illustration of this subject. The end is, that by our spontaneous impulses we may be put in the place, and in the way of extending relief when it is wanted, and when it is in our power to afford it. Numberless are the instances in which our feelings have led us, without any previous thought of usefulness or duty, to the opportunity of doing the most honourable and benevolent actions, and then prompted us to use it, while our reason has been left to come in afterward to examine and weigh at its leisure, the merit of the impulse and the achievement. Were our passions as slow, as our systematick investigations, we could do and enjoy but little in this short life. By their prompt and powerful efforts we are often thrown into situations, where we cannot but be disinterested and magnanimous ; where we open to ourselves sources of thought, feeling and enjoyment to which we should never have been conducted by cold calculation. It is a great purpose in this arrangement of Providence to unfold our powers and form our characters. For this end we must have trials and distresses as well as blessings and encouragements. We arrive at the knowledge of others only through the labours and struggles of our own minds. We cannot develope our faculties, understand our nature, and enjoy our existence, without the relations, the wants, and the sympathies of society. It is a valuable end, which is to be answered by the interest we take in the distress of others, that we are thus led to the place and the opportunity of relief, and are assisted in unfolding the powers of the mind and in forming a benevolent character.

Another cause of the interest and pleasure we derive from scenes of distress, lies in that which has been already illustrated in part by the remarks upon sympathy and curiosity, but which as embracing other faculties deserves a distinct consideration : We mean *mental exercise*, the employment of the mind without any reference to a further end, or to any result in practice. Mental exercise is desirable in itself ; and is often *ultimate*, when said of the mind at large, as much as when it is said of sympathy in particular. It is not only to be desired because it relieves us from languor, which is a real evil, but because it is an independent pleasure, a positive good. We eat not merely to support life or remove the pain of hunger, but because there is a pleasure in the action. We exercise

our bodies not merely to do business and preserve health, but because the exercise is itself an enjoyment. It is the same with the mind. Whatever gives it action, whatever awakens it to effort, is welcomed as a source of happiness. Whoever thinks that happiness consists in the repose, the inaction of the mind, rather than in its efforts 'is like the man who should make the horses in his coach stand still, because he could hold the reins more easily.'

We might offer a further illustration of the pleasure derived from some scenes of distress, by the operation of a sense of *justice*, and of the propriety of *retribution*. Pain may be inflicted either as a punishment, as a motive to reformation, or as a trial of character for future reward. In any of these relations, the mind looks at the wisdom and benevolence of the object, and is thus reconciled to the pain. But this view of the subject does not belong to our plan of treating it.

In regard to imaginary scenes of distress, the remarks already made about those which are real, are generally applicable. But to these we must add the interest and delight which result from the genius, taste, and feeling of the writer. We probably weep more generally and easily over imaginary distress, or simple and natural descriptions of the sufferings of generous minds, than over distress which is real and present. In the real and present distress of others, especially among the poor, there are often circumstances of coarseness, vulgarity, deception, and selfishness which disgust us, which weaken the force of sympathy, and leave us to act more from a sense of duty than from impulse. The mind is employed in devising the means of relief, of alleviation, or of correction. It has the spirit of *business* to check its sensibility. Duty and example often require habitual self-command, and forbid any outward exhibition of weakness, or what might be considered as such. But in imaginary distress, or in the descriptions of suffering, the circumstances are all selected and arranged for the purpose of sentimental effect. Whatever would mar the interest is excluded. All the sentiments expressed are noble and disinterested, or selfish and dishonourable, according to the wants and wishes of genius, and the force of contrast to heighten the description. The mind of the reader is left perfectly free from the responsibility of action, and may indulge its feelings and its tears without the check which

the task of business or relief would impose. That one should weep over a novel, or a tragedy, and not at the sufferings of the poor around him, at the sorrows of the bereaved, or the distress of the persecuted, is no proof of the want of sensibility. He who is most efficient to discover and relieve the wants of the community, is never the man of tears, while discharging the great duties of philanthropy. But place the same generous benefactor, after a day spent in active benevolence, at the fireside of his parlour, surrounded by his family, reading a well wrought tale of wo, and his eyes will fill with tears at the sympathetick turns of the story, and the disinterested sentiments of afflicted virtue.

In a review of our remarks upon this subject, the pleasure which we derive from scenes of distress both in real life, and in the works of fiction, appears to arise from sympathy, from curiosity, from the love of novelty, from our attachment to strong emotions and excitements, from the valuable and practical end which our interest in the distress of others promotes, from the developement of our faculties and the formation of character, from mental exercise generally, from a sense of justice and retribution, from the idea of a probation in order to deserve a future reward, from invention and skill in the productions of genius, and from the social and generous nature of our passions.